W

The Pop Issue

Miley Cyrus

Pop Whiz

Photographed by Alasdair McLellan
Styled by Sara Moonves

Miley Cyrus wears a **Gucci** dress.

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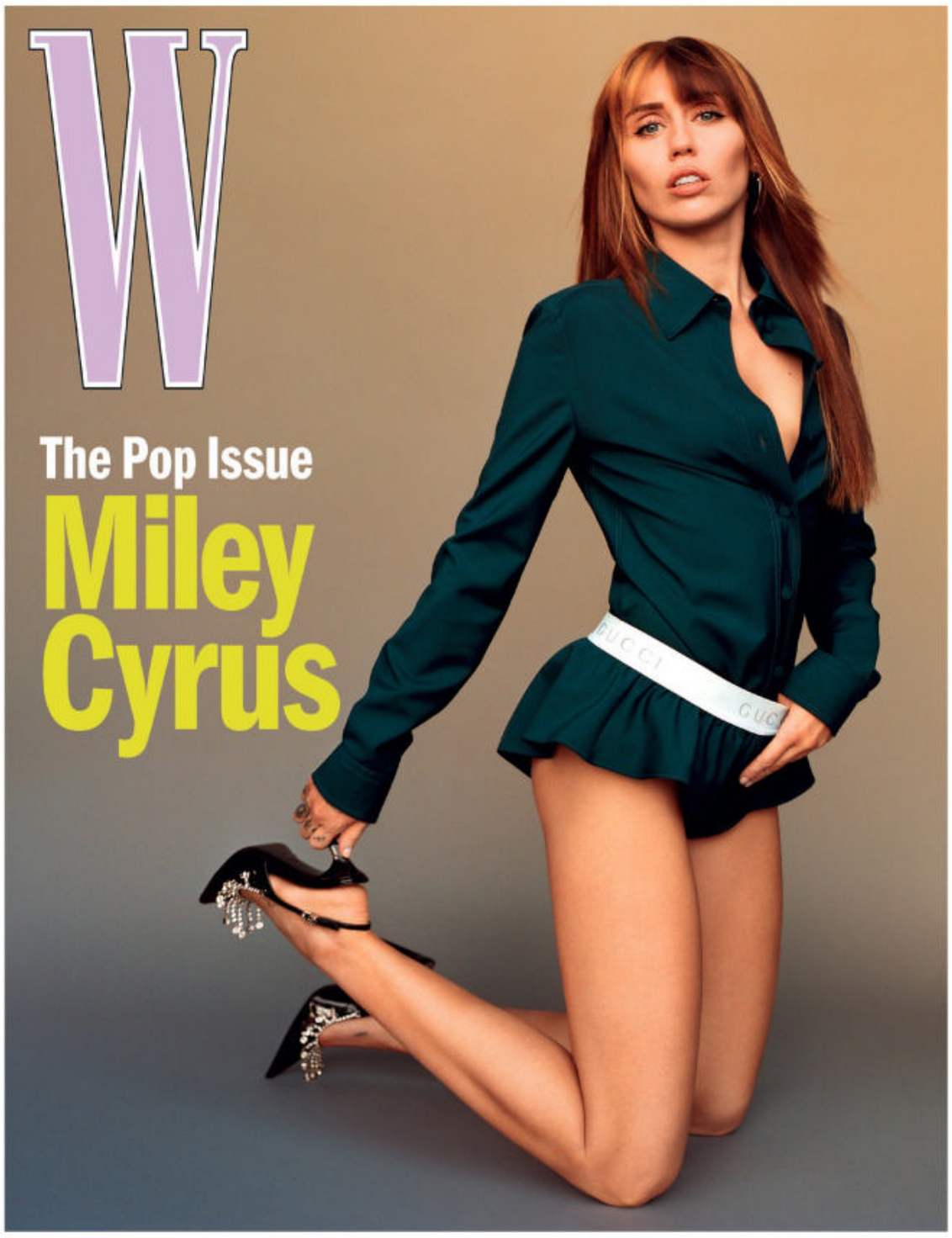

Miley Cyrus wears a **Gucci** shirt, shorts, and shoes; **Tiffany & Co.** earrings. Photographed by Alasdair McLellan and styled by Sara Moonves.

Top of the Pops

On a perfect spring day in New York City, Miley Cyrus walked into a photo studio wearing jeans and a black Gucci jacket. Her hair was wet, and her instantly recognizable face was partially obscured by big sunglasses. I had never met Cyrus before, but we quickly started chatting. She was warm, funny, friendly, and confident—someone who exudes joy and makes you feel happy to be around her.

She said that it would not take a long time to fit clothes on her, and she wasn't kidding: Everything she tried on looked amazing. We spent the day dancing to Serge Gainsbourg, talking about her epic Grammys performance and the equally epic Maison Margiela look she wore on the red carpet. Cyrus was going on a much-deserved vacation the day after the shoot, and with good reason: As she tells writer Alex Hawgood, in recent months she has finally racked up the well-deserved accolades that have eluded her in the past ("Pop Whiz," page 108).

Cyrus was just the starting point for this year's Pop Issue, which is jam-packed with cultural legends and innovators. In our "Life in Parties" section (page 50), we feature the Misshapes, the trio of cool kids who were a huge part of New York nightlife when I moved to the city. Their pictures made a lot of us feel nostalgic—and a little old! We even found an image of our Creative Director at Large, Kevin Tekinel, having too much of a good time with designer Olivier Theyskens and singer Sky Ferreira.

We take you from early-aughts New York nightlife to the newest It girl to hit the scene. Romy Mars, daughter of the film director Sofia Coppola and Phoenix frontman Thomas Mars, was photographed by Craig McDean and styled by Grace Coddington. Mars, who went viral after posting a hilariously rebellious TikTok, speaks to our Editor at Large, Lynn Hirschberg, whom she has known since the day she was born, about her musical debut ("Introducing: Romy Mars," page 90). Elsewhere, Senior Digital Editor Maxine Wally talks to Pharrell Williams about his newest creative undertaking, a line of jewelry for Tiffany & Co. ("A Man of Many Trades," page 98); we meet Tems, a bright new force in music, as well as a slew of other rising African pop stars ("Star of Africa," page 84); in suburban L.A., we visit the artist Jennifer Rochlin, whose brightly painted ceramic vessels often chronicle her personal life ("Pot Art," page 66); and we reexamine the work of the late David Armstrong, a beloved photographer who may soon receive broader recognition thanks to an important retrospective of his work ("Lens Flair," page 60).

To cap things off, we have two fashion stories that drive the pop theme home. Photographer Rafael Pavarotti and stylist Katie Grand shot for a full 24 hours to bring you "The Surreal Deal" (page 122), featuring model Sheila Bawar. And for "Shady Lady" (page 136), photographer Carlijn Jacobs and stylist Imruh Asha worked with the iconic Kristen McMenamy on the streets of Paris, showcasing the poppiest and peppiest of the pre-fall collections.

Summer is around the corner, and the sky is finally a lot bluer. We hope you enjoy this vibrant issue.

Love,

Sara Moonves

Pop Whiz

She's spent more than half her life in the spotlight—but only now is Miley Cyrus receiving the accolades she deserves. By Alex Hawgood

Photographed by Alasdair McLellan
Styled by Sara Moonves

This page: Miley Cyrus wears a **Gucci** dress. *Opposite:* **Chanel** jacket.

Chanel jacket and skirt.

Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello
bodysuit, skirt, and belt.

The Row shirt, vest,
and turtleneck.

Chanel jacket and skirt; her own earring.

True to form, Miley Cyrus blasted through this year's Grammys like a wrecking ball. Hair teased to the cosmos, she hit the red carpet in a risqué Maison Margiela Artisanal dress made out of 14,000 gold safety pins—the first of five dramatic outfits. She performed "Flowers," the best-selling global single of last year, in shimmering vintage Bob Mackie, serving face and tossing quips ("Why are you acting like you don't know this song?") with '70s-Cher aplomb. After slipping into a one-shoulder sequined Gucci number by Sabato De Sarno, the veteran singer accepted Record of the Year with a wink-wink, nudge-nudge acknowledgement that it was her very first Grammy win. "This award is amazing, but I really hope that it doesn't change anything, because my life was beautiful yesterday," she said, before cracking a joke about going commando on music's biggest night.

Cyrus is finally getting industry respect after decades of being pigeonholed: first as the daughter of the country crooner Billy Ray Cyrus, then as a Disney-fied teen dream, and later as an advocate of in-your-face female sexuality. "No shade," Cyrus told me matter-of-factly, "but I've been doing this for 20 years, and this is my first time actually being taken seriously at the Grammys? I've had a hard time figuring out what the measurement is there, because if we want to talk stats and numbers, then where the fuck was I? And if you want to talk, like, impact on culture, then where the fuck was I? This is not about arrogance. I am proud of myself."

Everything certainly seems to be coming up roses for Cyrus these days. "II Most Wanted," her duet with Beyoncé on *COWBOY CARTER*, recently became Cyrus's 13th top-10 song on the Billboard Hot 100 charts. Nearly two decades after she auditioned for *Hannah Montana*, at the age of 13, she is set to become the youngest entertainer to be named a Disney Legend. Here, Cyrus addresses her drag persona, working out in heels, and how she deals with the thin line between being a pop idol and being a private individual.

Your godmother, Dolly Parton, had this to say about you: "She never stops and is always in the loop with all the things pertaining to the business, records, and people I should know and work with."

Dolly's been like a mother to me. Actually, I was just reading this fax that she sent me two Mother's Days ago.

Dolly faxing is 100 percent part of my *9 to 5* fantasy.

No one else faxes. I literally have to access my lawyer's office, because the lawyer is the only person who can still receive a fax. Dolly wrote to me to say: "How much do I love you? As much as my heart can hold and as far as my arms can reach." It gets me choked up. I just love her so much. Last Christmas, she gave me a whole mannequin, done in her proportions and wearing her outfit. It's so major.

The "Flowers" performance at the Grammys has over 33 million views on YouTube. How does one prepare for that?

I wrote on this dream board that I wanted to show up to the Grammys with a childlike confidence, like when a kid isn't scared to just dive into the deep end or do a backflip because they don't know what's on the other side. My 12-year-old self got to come out and play, while my 31-year-old self was in Bob Mackie with big hair.

Gucci's Sabato De Sarno, your friend and collaborator, said that you're a "volcano of creativity" who "takes you by the hand and makes you step into her world without you having the time to realize it."

Sabato and I became close friends in an instant. He's one of those people who, whether I'm in a time that's challenging or a time that's celebratory, I could honestly call, and I could feel heard and cared for, which is so rare in fashion. I always have on Gucci's Flora fragrance. It has become a part of my identity. You know how a certain smell could bring you back to your grandma's house? In the middle of chaos, it's like I can smell who I am. My friends know when I am in their home because of the fragrance.

Not only do you smell good, but you've become quite the source of fitspiration on the Internet.

My lifestyle is extremely clean. Sobriety is a big part of it. My mantra is, like any athlete, "Practice how you perform." So that's why I practice in my heels. The gym looks really tough, but then I've got my ivory Gucci slingbacks because they remind me of Marilyn Monroe. I train in heels, mostly. I'm interested in feminizing the workout space, because so much of the workout equipment is ugly.

The heels never come off?

I was gonna say, I'm fully out of drag today. I definitely have a persona—an expanded, fully realized version of myself that I tap into as a performer. But then there's a level of my life that's super intimate, sacred, and secret. Sometimes I forget to talk about things that are a normal part of my day-to-day, like texting with Beyoncé. I think it's a really cute part of our relationship, because over the past couple of years I've really locked down on my privacy and on what I share with the public. She's the same way. Part of our relationship is the safety between us. The songwriting or the work is just a small part of my relationship with her—or with Dolly, or with anyone. Our personas have a relationship, but then *we* have a relationship. And I love that.

How did "II Most Wanted" end up on *COWBOY CARTER*?

I wrote that song, like, two and a half years ago. My mom would always go, "I love that song so much." So when Beyoncé reached out to me about music, I thought of it right away because it really encompasses our relationship. I told her, "We don't have to get country; we are country. We've been country." I said, "You know, between you being from Texas and me being from Tennessee, so much of us is going to be in this song." Getting to write a song, not just sing, for Beyoncé was a dream come true.

Is this the first time that you two have collaborated?

We performed together when I was really young, probably 14, at the Stand Up to Cancer benefit. I was sandwiched between Beyoncé and Rihanna, who were, you know, five feet ten inches and in heels. Their hips were, like, up to my shoulders. They were these powerful, fully realized, grown women, and I'm pretty sure I had braces on the back of my teeth. They were protective of me. My mom helped some of the girls—Nicole Scherzinger's jeans were too big for her, so my mom went to H&M and bought her a gold-studded belt so she could perform. My mom still has that belt. I was in her closet the other day, and I was like, "Why the fuck do you have this gold-studded belt that was for Nicole Scherzinger?" That Christmas, Beyoncé sent me a House of Deréon jacket that said MILEY on the back in gold studs, which is my favorite, and some jeans with my name on it. In one of my songs, "Cattitude," I say, "And for my 16th birthday, I got Deréon from the house of the queen."

You and Beyoncé also have mothers who have been involved in your careers.

One of the things that we text about is our relationships with our mothers. Like her mom, Ms. Tina, my mom is also an M.T.: Mama Tish. A lot of people call her Mom, in the way that Ms. Tina is almost not just a mother to Beyoncé, but to Beyoncé's fans as well. Both of us grew up, in our own way, with moms who were everything. My mom was my makeup, hair, seamstress, styling, tour manager—like, the actual manager. The word "mother" is the most all-encompassing word. The mother can be RuPaul; the mother can be Beyoncé. Our fans call us "mother."

Speaking of mothering, you started Happy Hippie, a nonprofit for LGBTQ and homeless youth, a decade ago. How has the mission evolved over time?

Nothing in my life is singular. Singing with Beyoncé or performing with Ru is not separate from my foundation. It's been really important for me that my foundation grows and evolves. Happy Hippie speaks to my fans at the age I was when it launched—18, 19, 20, 21. But now I am renaming it the Miley Cyrus Foundation so the platform can facilitate more adult conversations. It's not that Happy Hippie is over; it is just kind of growing up. Actually, the Miley Cyrus Foundation is the mother to Happy Hippie. I'm calling it the "mother foundation." Working with Happy Hippie so closely, I've seen how these houses, especially in ballroom culture, have taken this word "mother" and created different families. So, celebrating and honoring the legacy of incredible mothers, whether it's Ms. Tina or Mama Tish, is really the mission of the Miley Cyrus Foundation. With the word "mother," we can talk about the planet, we can talk about agriculture, we can talk about medicine, we can talk about injustices, reproductive care.

You're being honored at this year's Disney Legends Awards Ceremony for having "pushed the envelope of creativity, challenged conventional wisdom, and broken the restraints of the status quo." Okay, Ms. Hannah Montana.

I'm down. It's a place to celebrate the journey of both being on and graduating from Disney. It was a great, safe experience overall. People have 50- or 60-year-long careers, but mine has been close to 20 years, and I'm 31. I have been in the public for more of my life than I haven't. They say that the creative adult is the child who survived. I worked really hard as a child. I didn't go to prom. I didn't go to dances. I didn't have so much of that social experience or time for friends. Disney, they were doing very well off of the amount of work that I was putting in as a child. I don't have any bad feelings about that. It's just the truth. And so I think they have to give me this award. I'm excited to celebrate that with the fans. Something I wanted to talk about with you is celebration versus competition, because competition is really of no interest to me. I don't think of other artists as opponents. Artists are not the same as athletes, playing a zero-sum game and keeping a score. There isn't a score in art.

Still, your recent wins seem long overdue. That must feel liberating, in a way.

I really wanted "Flowers" to be a celebration of bravery, because I perform out of fear. I didn't always have the fear of performing that I have now. But going from spending two years alone and seeing no more than one person a day during lockdown to knowing that millions of people watch the Grammys is a big shock to the nervous system. Anyone who's ever put themselves in a position to be observed or judged is brave. It doesn't matter if it's eight or eight million people—that fear is there. Before I went onstage, right as that curtain was about to lift, I was screaming at the top of my lungs, "I am free!" When I was 20 or 21, it might have sounded more like, "I don't give a fuck what people think. I'm just being me."

I think I need to start screaming "I am free!" more.

I love being an adult. I have a rule that I don't look up or don't look down at anyone. I just look, which allows me the clarity to see the world for what it really is and people for who they really are. I look at myself almost every day in the mirror and I say, "I am a woman." I'm 31 now, and I still don't know if I want kids or not. I feel like my fans kind of are my kids in some way. I've heard Dolly say that too, because she didn't have kids.

You recently covered "Psycho Killer," by Talking Heads. Surely, David Byrne must qualify as mother.

David—definitely, definitely mother. David and I are friends. On this particular cover, I really experimented with the sounds for "Psycho Killer," because that's really what Talking Heads and their records are about. I wanted it to sound like Kylie Minogue meets aggressive, industrial-dance dream pop. So this is definitely not a "Psycho Killer" that anyone knows.

A cover is like a musical alter ego, which you understand better than most.

So, I would like to act again. But the role would really need to be right, since it's kind of hard for people to see past me and buy into a character. The character would either need to be an extension of myself, or someone—or something—with a personality that can conquer my own. I would need a character that is bigger than me. ◆

Gucci shirt, shorts, and scarf.

Louis Vuitton skirt.

Ralph Lauren Collection skirt (worn as dress); **Tiffany & Co.** necklace; vintage belt from New York Vintage, New York.

Dolce & Gabbana cape, bustier, and shorts; stylist's own headscarf.

The Row vest, shirt, turtleneck, and pants.

Dior trenchcoat; **Falke** tights.

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Chanel jacket; stylist's own headscarf.